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ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 86 (2013) 188 – 191

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

V Congress of Russian Psychological Society

Actualization of Leadership Potential of Socially Gifted Children (experimental approach)

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Abstract

The article deals with the social and psychological conditions of education of youth leaders among the socially gifted children – the issue which has been extremely important for Russian psychology since 1920-s when it was examined by V.M. Bekhterev, E.A. Arkin, A.S. Zaluzhny, S.O. Lozinsky, and others. Theoretical and applied aspects of education of children groups' capable organizers were developed and implemented by A.S. Makarenko. The article discusses the results of the formative experiment on youth leaders training, which plays an important role in the life of children's society. The article describes a youth leadership research and formation strategy which has combined social gifts, small group as a subject of team-work, developing social environment and social education into one system.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Russian Psychological Society

Keywords: leadership; formative experiment; developing social environment social education; leaders personality changes.

Despite the terminological differences in names – the leaders, the activists, the organizers, socially gifted, – the category of children, who are able to lead the peers, stimulates great interest of teachers and psychologists due to the necessity of effective production of quality human material – a person with a high potential for enterprise and productivity, who is able to benefit the society. In the 1920's-1930's the problem of school leadership began to be developed more productively by V.M. Bekhterev [1] E.A. Arkin [2], A.S. Zaluzhny [3], S.O. Lozinsky [4], etc. It turned out that a child becomes a leader in case of coincidence of his personal characteristics and the group requirements, and the specific leadership skills change according to the team development.

The researchers of those years pointed out an important role of socially gifted children in the children community life. A prominent teacher, Professor E.A. Arkin noted that sometimes children-leaders can set the

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The work is supported by grant RGNF (project № 11-06-01102a)

tone for the life in higher degree than any didactic material and even teaching staff [2]. On the basis of the research of children's joint activity and the level of group organization A.S. Zaluzhny arrived at the conclusion that there are leaders, organizers and disorganizers even among preschoolers.

A.S. Makarenko attributed intellect, reasonableness, enterprise, ability to compute the work extremely well, to arrange people, to find some new methods and skills, courage and restraint, "ability to see every lad" and so on to a successful organizer's personality characteristics [5].

Later the problem of leadership lost its urgency and revived in 1960's due to the rapid development of Russian social psychology, using the ideas of B.F. Lomov's system approach [6], of A.A Bodalev's acmeological human development principles and the application of the experimental method by L.I. Umansky [7], A.S. Chernyshev and their followers [8] in the examination and training of youth leaders. L.Y. Umansky and his followers studied teenagers and adolescents' organizational skills and their development in terms of system approach in small groups in a multi-aspect joint cooperation and communication in the experimentally created developing social environment – a society which differs from a usual environment in its joint cooperation and communication characteristics of higher content and intension, in emotionally and intellectually rich atmosphere of cooperation and creativity [7], [8].

This provision became a turning methodological point in the determination of the research strategy and the formation of youth leadership, which united into one the following factors: social gifts, small group as a subject of activity and communication, developing social environments and social learning, which provides the formation of knowledge, skills and habits of constructive interaction with people on interpersonal and social levels, pointed at achievement of various, socially significant goals. [7], [8].

Social education is the formation of knowledge, skills and habits of constructive interaction with people on interpersonal and social levels, pointed at achievement of various, socially significant goals.

According to its subject and methods it is a type of psychological aid. To educate in the social sense means to help a person become a mature personality, able to live successfully in the society. The specific task of social learning is teaching to communicate as an organization of man's purposeful mastering the means and methods of communication with other people.

In our understanding the developing social environment (DSE) - is a society that is different from the usual environment in higher on the content and intensity characteristics of collaboration and communication, emotionally and intellectually rich atmosphere of cooperation and creativity. In such an environment, interpersonal, as well as intergroup mechanisms of successful self-development of personality and groups are most completely actualized. The role of psychologists-teachers is mainly to set uniform "rules of the game." The educatory effect is primarily provided through the social activity of the participants themselves.

The theoretical grounds for creating such environments lie in the conceptions of S.L. Rubinstein [9], B.F. Lomov [6], L.I. Umansky [7], V.V. Rubtsov [10], A.V. Brushlinsky [11], and others. E. Fromm's ideas of social oases and of their gradual extension to the whole society as permanent assets of "the mental health improvement of the mankind" [12] seem to be quite modern and fruitful. On the ground of the abovementioned there have been formulated hypothetic provisions about the realization of the leadership capabilities of the socially gifted children under the conditions of a large-scale formative experiment, and in accordance with these conditions it was acceptable that periodical inclusion of individuals and groups of teenagers and adolescents as subjects of joint activity and communication into specially created real improved social environments ("social oases") on the ground of the actualization of the principle of combining social knowledge with social action led to the substantial leadership and personal changes of the individuals ("person's social renovation") and to the level increase of social-psychological maturity of the groups.

For this purpose as an experimentative range away back in the sixties of the 20th century there was opened a continuously working (up to the present moment) Kursk regional youth leaders school where yearly 200-300 senior students are given training, and in the last 46 years over 36 thousand foster-children have been prepared,

many of them have become outstanding organizers in different fields of the national economy. The contingent is formed in the first instance from creative and initiative students who after training are able to rally an infant group independently, become leaders in their schools.

In DSE such socially valuable factors of influence are intensified:

- Formation of spiritual culture of youth society

The main conditions of formation of motivation are: joint experience by young men of feeling of participation in the special youth subculture, combining romanticism and high social activity; feeling of accessory to prestigious public organization of the region; familiarizing with the high vital purposes and values.

- Inclusion of participants in the high-organized community

The level of organization of the developing social environment sharply contrasts with the usual living environment. Organizational norms, structure and processes are clearness and orderliness. Collective actions are performed in fast and coordinated tempo-rhythm. High degree of individuals' inclusiveness in joint activity is typical.

- Democratic introduction of an organizational order

Organizational norms and structure are represented at general meeting at the very beginning of change not as "directives of teachers' meeting", but as long-term traditions in which creation the pupils participated also. Thus, opportunity and need of participation of children for proceeding rule-making are emphasized.

- Social, spiritual and subject enrichment of activity

High-substantial both in social, and in the spiritual relation, various activity in the subject plan is a backbone factor of the developing social environment, defining its orientation and a qualitative originality. The pupils participate in group discussions on socially and personally significant themes, prepare the dramatized representations, compete in sports and intellectual competitions, in song and dancing festivals. The special place is taken by labor activity: it is the help in restoration of historical monuments, participation in ecological actions and help aged and disabled persons.

The most significant results have been revealed in the enrichment of consciousness within the phenomenon "personal growth", embodied in the desire for development of one's leadership skills, in the search of opportunities for self-actualization within the educational and extracurricular activities, in the demonstration of activity in personal self-perfection, in the work on one's weaknesses, and complexes.

Positive tendencies have been outlined in the system of social guidelines. The most priority guidelines were such as follows: aspiration to find the purport of life and the explanation of one's own searches; awareness of one's importance; rather developed attitude towards oneself, ability to see the most essential and intrinsic things in one's personality and life; feeling of participation in social creativity, motivation to the creation of something new; guideline aimed at success in activity; experience of legal behavior, etc.; satisfaction with life.

Positive changes have also appeared at the behavioural level; in activity, and acts. Young men acquire an aptitude for quick inclusion in the organization of joint activity on the achievement of accepted purposes. They successfully realize protection of their own interests and interests of others, using, at the same time, cultured ways of discussion and communication, an ability to persist in one's opinion, to resolve conflicts, to give estimate to oneself and others adequately. After returning from the Center to their schools, many children become initiators and organizers of various socially significant undertakings.

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